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ABSTRACT

This document is a collection of writings by refugee and minority children from the George Orwell School in London (England) and the Montessori College in Oost, Amsterdam (the Netherlands). About one-third of the students at the George Orwell School, were refugees. These students were aged 11 to 16 years old. About 30 to 40% of the students at the Montessori College were refugees. These students were 12 to 19 years old. All of the students who contributed these narratives were in the process of learning a new language and beginning life in a new country, coping with a new culture and with racism, and having left family and friends behind. Their narratives are divided into: (1) "The Country Where I Used To Live"; (2) "Family and Friends"; (3) "Life in a New Country"; (4) "School"; (5) "Aspects of Identity: Culture, Language, and Religion"; and (6) "The Future." Notes for teachers are included, with some activities for discussions and student worksheets. It is noted that the publication will assist British curriculum Key State 3 and 4 teachers in the delivery of the general requirements for English and can be used to meet General National Vocational Qualification requirements. A map of contributors' countries and regions of origin is included. (SLD)

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Forging New Identities

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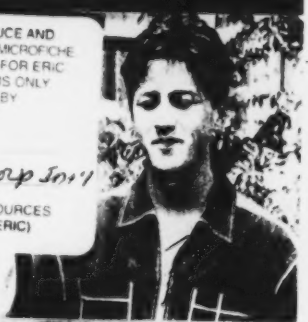

Views from London and Amsterdam

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About *Forging New Identities*

Edited by Minority Rights Group International

Forging New Identities: Young Refugees and Minority Students Tell their Stories is a collection of writings by refugee and minority children from the George Orwell School, London and the Montessori College Oost, Amsterdam.

The writings in *Forging New Identities* are, as far as possible, in the contributors' own words, expressing their own opinions, emotions and experiences. These views do not necessarily represent the views of MRG.

The contributors

Many thanks to the following students who participated in the project with so much enthusiasm, sharing their memories, thoughts and opinions about so many aspects of their lives. Each student's country or region of origin is given in brackets after their name below.

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MRG:

- **Commissions and publishes well-researched and accessible Reports, Books and Papers on minority issues.**
- **Promotes minority rights through direct advocacy in international fora and in dialogue with governments.**
- **Builds on a global network of like-minded organizations and minority communities to cooperate on minority rights issues.**
- **Challenges prejudice and racism through its education and information projects.**

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Contributors' Countries and Regions of Origin

1	Afghanistan	4	Dem. Rep. of Congo (formerly Zaïre)	6	Ghana	9	Kurdistan	12	Pakistan	15	Thailand
2	Bosnia-Herzegovina			7	Guinea-Bissau	10	Mauritania	13	Sierra Leone	16	Turkey
3	Colombia	5	Eritrea	8	Kosovo	11	Morocco	14	Somalia	17	UK

Introduction

Throughout Europe, many young refugees and people from ethnic minorities are forging a new identity – often very successfully but also often painfully. The students whose writing is included in this book were part of a project which linked young refugees and minority students in the UK and the Netherlands to help them explore their experiences and feelings about their identity in a multicultural society. This project built on previous work conducted by MRG in partnership with refugee groups, which had led to the educational publications in the *Voices* series.

In the project leading to the production of this book, two schools – one in London and one in Amsterdam – were linked for an academic year. The London school was George Orwell School, a comprehensive, taking in students aged 11–16, which has a good reputation for its work with refugee students and their communities. Approximately a third of pupils at the school are refugees, mostly from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kurdistan, Somalia and Somaliland. The partner school in Amsterdam was Montessori College Oost, a secondary school taking students from ages 12–19. About a third of the students were learning Dutch as a second language and some 30–40 per cent of these students were refugees – from, among other places, Afghanistan, Angola, China, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kurdistan, Somalia, former Yugoslavia and Zaïre (now the Democratic Republic of Congo).

While all the participating students in London were refugees, the students in Amsterdam were a mixture of refugees and minority students who had recently arrived in the Netherlands. However all the students were sharing the experience of learning an additional language; starting life in a completely new country, having left family and friends behind in their country of origin; coping with racism; being part of two cultures; and ultimately creating a new identity for themselves.

As part of their English lessons in the London school and as part of their Dutch classes in the Amsterdam school, students developed their language skills in English or Dutch through language work that was interesting and relevant to them because it was directly about their personal experiences. The students' level of involvement in these lessons in both countries was good. The teachers of the groups in London and Amsterdam corresponded frequently, and shared lesson ideas, as well as sharing the students' finished writing, which is reproduced here in *Forging New Identities*.

A central part of the project was the exchange of letters between the students in London and Amsterdam. This provided a real purpose for the students to write letters but even more important was the sense that they were writing to young people in a similar situation to themselves. It was anticipated that many students would be able to write to each other in their first language, but this was only possible for two Somali students and two students writing in Turkish, who were very excited to receive letters in their respective languages. A teacher at the school in Amsterdam translated the Dutch students' letters into English and translated the replies from London into Dutch. Students in the two countries also exchanged photographs of each other, and the students in London made a video of themselves and sent it to the partner school.

This book of personal writing by students in both countries is the culmination of a process of exchange and sharing of experiences which was of great significance to the young people involved. As well as developing language and literacy skills through topics of personal importance, the students had, I think, a sense of not being alone in their attempt to forge new lives in a different country. In addition to the value for the participants in the project and the model the project provides of a way of working in partnership across countries, this book is of value to other audiences.

First, it enables other young refugees and minorities to read about experiences which may be similar to their own and so provides a meaningful resource for teachers and others to use with these young people. Second, and perhaps most importantly, the book provides materials for teachers of majority students to use to raise awareness of the experiences of young refugees and minorities. Hopefully, this will enable young people who are not from minority groups to have a deeper understanding of some of the difficulties refugees and minorities face in leaving their own country to start a new life; of the memories, culture and strengths people bring with them; and of the whole process of forging a new identity in a multicultural society.

Forging New Identities reflects the similarity and the diversity in individuals' experience of migration.

Rachel Warner
FORMER HEAD OF EDUCATION, MRG

Notes for teachers

The young people who contributed to this book all share the experience of having to build a sense of belonging and identity in a new environment. All the students are minorities within this new environment and many are refugees. In addition, they have the shared experience of having to learn a new language, while adjusting to a new educational system. It should be noted that the students were using either English or Dutch as a very recently acquired second language to express complex and, at times, painful thoughts. Their own accounts of their experiences of finding a sense of identity in multicultural urban communities in the UK and the Netherlands will have relevance for many young people, whatever their backgrounds.

Comments from the students involved in the project:

- Mamadou (from Mauritania): 'I liked being asked to write about my own experiences and it has helped me to think about them. Because I was writing about things important to me it has helped me to improve my Dutch.'

- Nermin (from Bosnia-Herzegovina): 'I liked writing to someone in London, also someone from Kosovo. I liked learning about life in England.'

- Mohamed (from Morocco): 'I liked getting information from students about their home countries, information you wouldn't get in a book.'

Forging New Identities will be particularly useful to teachers of refugee and minority students learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) as well as bilingual learners.

Teachers wishing to encourage their students' skills of communication, discussion, empathy and narrative – as well as those wishing to bring a global dimension to their teaching – will find the material particularly appropriate. (Teachers should note that some terms occur in the text which may be unfamiliar to some students – for example, names of religious festivals).

This publication will also assist Key Stage 3 and 4 teachers in the delivery of the general requirements of English in the National Curriculum. For example, it will assist students to:

- formulate, clarify and express their ideas;
- listen, understand and respond appropriately to others;
- understand and respond to the texts they read.

This book will provide stimulating classroom materials to help General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) teachers in the delivery of the key skill, communication, and has relevance in supporting the themes of citizenship, equal opportunities and values across the curriculum.

Background

During the course of the project the students discussed and wrote about a wide range of topics. The work created a forum of mutual trust, where students were able to talk about painful aspects of their lives, sometimes for the first time, in a school context. The young refugee and minority students valued the opportunity to draw upon and reflect upon their own experiences and to share these with others who had comparable experiences, albeit from different countries and circumstances. All the students shared a sense of displacement and, in many cases, isolation.

Listed below are the topics which particularly engaged the students. Teachers may find the suggested areas for discussion and writing useful. It is very important to note that the topics are clearly very personal, and may be painful; they should always be treated with sensitivity and tact if working with a similar group of young people.

Activities for discussion

The suggested questions for discussion are particularly relevant to students with backgrounds similar to the young people who took part in the project. Teachers will want to select topics which best meet the needs of their students.

Suggested activities to prompt group as well as class discussion, debate and writing:

Brainstorming

Brainstorm in small groups and feed back to the whole class. Students can take it in turns to record the main points which can be used as the basis for individual writing on the chosen topic.

Interviewing

Interview in pairs basing questions on those given under each topic. The interviewers should write up their findings for comment by the interviewees.

Time lines

Students plot significant events in their lives up to the present and then plot how they hope their lives will develop in the next 15 years.

Research

Using the information given in the young peoples' accounts, as well as other sources, including the press, students can build up fact and opinion files about their chosen country. Don't forget to find out about things like festivals, holidays and popular music.

Questions for students to discuss, think about and write about:

Family

Who is in your family? Where are they? Who does what? Do you have an extended family? What kind of contact do you have with family members in your homeland? What does family life mean to you? What is important about your family? How do you feel about your new life and what you have left behind?

Friends

Who are your friends – both here and in your homeland? Can you describe a special friend here or there and say what makes the friendship special? Is there anything that you miss about your friends in your homeland? Is it important to have friends of the same ethnic background as yourself or not? How easy/difficult has it been to make friends in your new country? What do you do with your friends here? What do you talk about? What did you do with your friends in your homeland?

Language

What does your first language mean to you? Is it important to you, and why/why not? Who do you speak it with and why? What sort of things do you talk about in your first language? What was it like to start learning English? What about reading and writing in your own language – is it important to keep that up? Do you feel that you are losing your first language? Is it inevitable that people lose their first language if they move from country to country? Is it important for people to retain their first language even if they no longer live in their homeland or that of their parents?

Religion

How important is religion in your life? Has that importance changed since you left your homeland? What do you look for in religion? If you follow a religion, does it make you feel different from other young people? Is your religion as much a part of a culture as a set of beliefs? Are there any particular aspects of your religion, such as certain festivals, that are particularly important to you?

Food, clothes, music

Can you describe your attitudes to these aspects of your culture? What are your attitudes now that you live in a new country? Have these attitudes changed? How do your parents and other family members feel about these changes?

You and your identity

How do you describe yourself – e.g. by nationality, by ethnic group, by religion, by appearance? How would others describe/label you? How do you feel about those labels and descriptions? What are you proud of – concerning yourself, your family, your homeland, your community? Who are the people who are especially important to you and why are they important? What have been the positive/negative things about coming to live in a different country? Do you see yourself as British? What makes up Britishness? Are your views different from those of your parents or other family members?

School

What have been the major differences between school in your homeland and your new country? In what ways has your new school helped you to adjust to the new way of life? Could things have been improved?

The future

How do you see the future? What are your hopes and fears? What could be different between your future as you believe it probably will be, and the way you would like it to be?

N.B. The student worksheets which follow are based upon those used during the project. These were found to provide practice in language skills, as well as giving the young people the opportunity to raise issues of immediate concern to them from their own perspectives as refugee and minority students.

PLEASE PHOTOCOPY FOR CLASSROOM USE

Student project worksheets

Someone who is important to me

Choose one person who is particularly important to you. Write a longer description of this person. Use the ideas below to help you if you wish. You can write in your first language or English.

Who is the person? What is their name? Are they a relative or a friend? Where do they live? Are they alive or are they dead?

Describe the person. How old are they? What do they look like? What are they like — kind, funny, generous, wise, thoughtful, sensitive, helpful, fun, good to talk to? What do/did they do as a job?

What are your memories of this person? Can you describe a few times you were with them which you particularly remember? What sort of things did you do with them? Do you have any bad memories as well as good?

Where is this person now, if you know? Do you write to them or phone them? Do you often think about them?

PLEASE PHOTOCOPY FOR CLASSROOM USE

People who are important to me

Use this chart to write about people who are important to you.
For each person who is important to you, write their name.
Then write something about them:

- Age?
- What do they do?
- Where do they live (Britain or your home country)?
- Are they alive or dead?

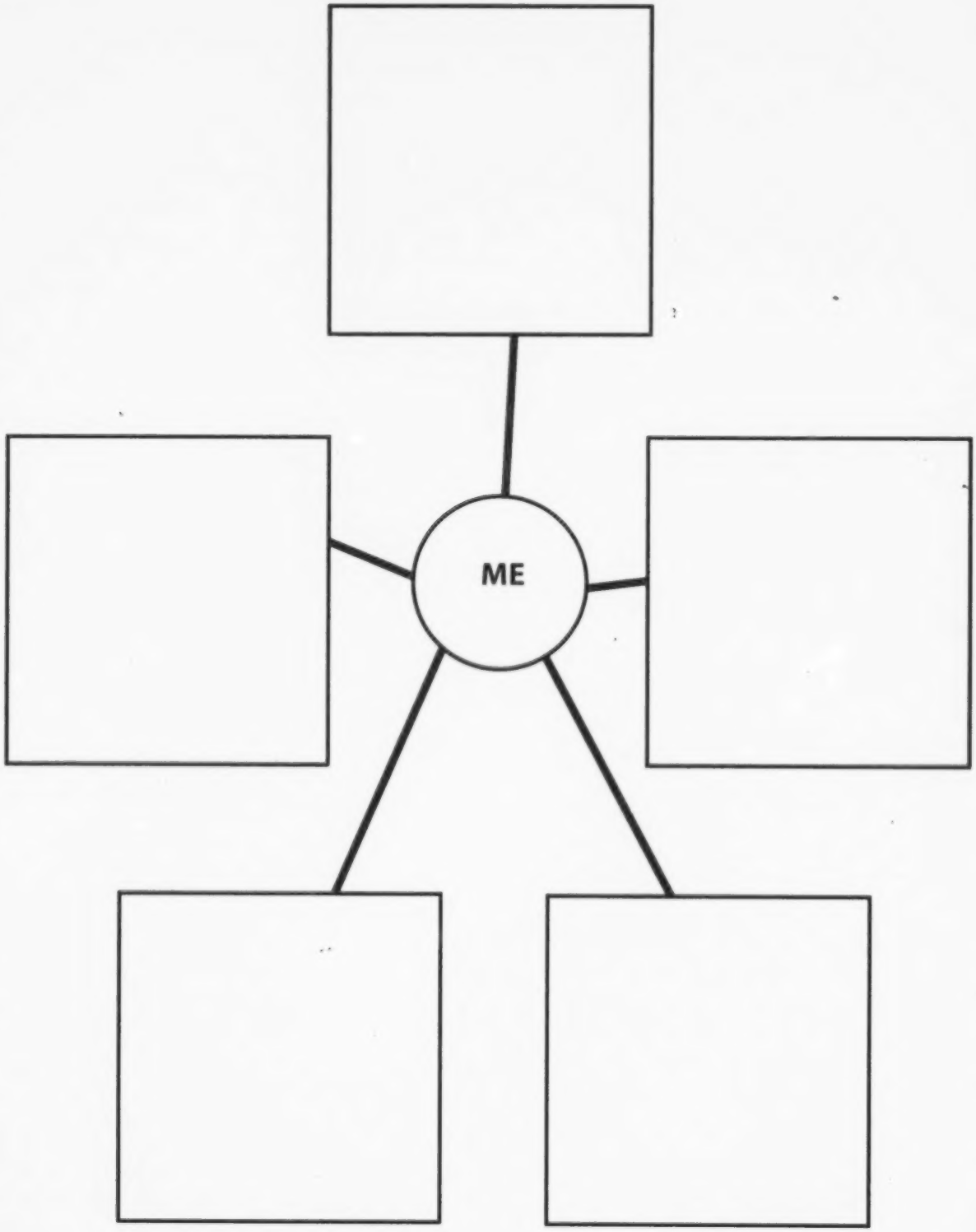
Then say why they are important to you.

Friend		
Friend	**Parent(s)**	**Neighbour**
Teacher	**Brother/sister**	**Family friend**
Grandmother	**Grandfather**	**Other**

PLEASE PHOTOCOPY FOR CLASSROOM USE

People who are important to me

Choose the five most important people and put them on the poster below.



PLEASE PHOTOCOPY FOR CLASSROOM USE

Myself

Write about yourself, in English and in your first language.

My name is _____

I am _____ **years old and I come from** _____ **but now I live in** _____

I came to _____ **in 19**_____

I speak _____ **and I read and write** _____

I am learning _____ **at school**

in _____ **I live with** _____

but my _____ **still live in** _____

My good and bad memories

I am from _____ **I have good and bad memories of my country**

My good memories are _____

_____

_____

_____ **and** _____

My best memory is _____

I have many bad memories too. They are _____

_____

_____

_____ **and** _____

My worst memory is _____

PLEASE PHOTOCOPY FOR CLASSROOM USE

Could you illustrate your memories with drawings?

Other people's memories

Selam came to Britain as a refugee from Eritrea.
She can remember both **good** and **bad** things about Eritrea.
Read her account (on page 11) along with those of others in this book and then fill in this table:

Name	Country	Good memories	Bad memories

1 The country where I used to live

Memories of Guinea-Bissau

Michell Diallo (Netherlands)

When I was in Guinea, I got along well with my teachers. In the city, I went with my friends to play by the sea. We swam and threw sand at each other. When school was in session, I slept at the school. I did my homework together with my classmates.

Sometimes I went to my village in the holidays. I went on walks in the woods with my friends. We hunted for animals such as rabbits and birds. I thought it was wonderful. Sometimes they organized a party for me in my village. And when the moon was full, we played from midnight until five or six in the morning. My holiday was always fun. But my father didn't always let me go. In the city, I went to the disco and to the cinema when I had time off. At school, I kept on studying and playing sports.

Bad memories: Sometimes all my friends would hit me! I was not strong. Then my mother died in a car accident and my father followed her. I was alone. Nobody helped me. And my good life began to change. Our house was destroyed by bad people. And then I knew what I had to do.

Memories of Pakistan

Uzma Mohammad Siddique (Netherlands)

I lived in Pakistan. A good memory of that country is that the people are very nice when something terrible happens. For example, when my mother was sick, the neighbours came to take care of us, clean the house, cook the food and do the washing.

Memories of Pakistan

Rehman Mohammed (Netherlands)

The country where I used to live is very beautiful. Almost every day the weather is beautiful. Sometimes it rains.

I was very happy with my family and friends. Sometimes we all went to our home village, where my aunts lived. First we went shopping for all the children we knew. Then we shared out the things and the toys that we had bought. Then we had a party. There was music too, and we danced and joked. After that, we went back to the city. We are not as good at parties here as in Pakistan. Afterwards we went to all the houses in our area. You had to eat something in each house, it didn't matter what, but you had to eat something. That was lots of fun.

We got three days off from school for the festival of Eid ul-Adha. After that, we had to go back to school.

, We had to wear the same clothes and the same shoes, that way nobody could tell whether you were rich or poor. At school we played hockey three times a week. When the weather was nice, we went to the swimming pool.

Memories of Eritrea

Selam Samuel (UK)

The things I like about Eritrea are the lovely weather, the nice food and my wonderful family and friends. The weather is nice and warm. The food is very hot and spicy but tastes nice, and so do the drinks. I really miss my mum and dad and also my friends because we used to go out together and have fun during school time and weekends.

My bad memory is the war because I lost my family and some friends. I'm scared of war because I saw people dying and a lot of blood. There was no security until the war finished, but now I feel safe here.

Memories of Afghanistan

Masood Begzad (Netherlands)

Ten years ago I had a great life. We were all together: father, mother, sisters and brothers, and my other family members. In the mornings I went to school and in the evenings I played football with my friends and enjoyed it very much.

Then Russia attacked Afghanistan and they didn't know that some people in Afghanistan did not want a foreign government. So from that day on the people resisted and the Russians killed many people, and many, many members of my family.

The boys didn't go to school. Nobody was interested in going to school, because the Russians taught at the schools and the people had too many problems. They emigrated to various countries, the Netherlands, Germany, America and so on.

Memories of Somalia

Mustaf Mohamed (Netherlands)

Before I start my story, I would like to say that it makes me a little sad when I talk about the things that are in the past, the things that I have experienced. Nobody wants to remember their bad times, but my teacher asked me to talk about it.

I was born and grew up in Somalia, and I went to secondary school there. When I was finished with school, a war broke out and my father was shot by the people who wanted to take over the government. Then I had to leave with my mother, and it was a bit difficult.

I could not run because I was so sad about my dead father, and then my mother told me that we had to leave Somalia. There were not enough cars, and we decided to walk to another city. We walked for two days and a night. Fortunately we had food, but we slept on the ground in the woods until we reached the other city.

Those are my bad memories. That is the reason why I don't want to say any more or remember what I have experienced.

Memories of Thailand

Phimsiri Ruangkham (Netherlands)

When I was in Thailand, children used to come to my house every evening to play. That was lots of fun because the children were very nice and the same age as me. Every evening we all ate together and played together, badminton or football, for example. Everyone loved each other and helped each other. I cannot forget those friendly children because I love my friends.

My life

Lul Ugas (UK)

Where shall I start? I will start when I was a little girl, when I was in Somalia. I lived in a town called Holwadaag. It was great over there, a wonderful place. I lived there with my mum and my father, and brother and sister. But after a few years my father died. After my father died, I lived with my mum for about one month, then I had to travel to Ethiopia, because there was fighting in my country.

My mum didn't have that much money so I had to give her money to help her travel. I was in Ethiopia for about six months, then I had to travel to Yemen which is an Arab country. We couldn't stay in Ethiopia because we didn't have much money and food was not cheap, so that's why we all had to travel to Yemen. I was in Yemen for two years. After two years there was fighting in Yemen so we all had to come back to Ethiopia. Again we stayed in Ethiopia for six months, then we all had to travel to England.

So now I have to try to send some money to my mum. I would like to live with my mum. I don't think we can all live together, but I always think of her and I will always remember her. Now I can eat and drink and I am getting an education, but I think of my brothers and my sisters and I will always remember them.

Memories of Sierra Leone

Zacharia Wurie (Netherlands)

I come from Sierra Leone, a country on the west coast of Africa. When I came to the Netherlands, everything I saw seemed a bit strange, but now I know more about the differences between my country and the Netherlands.

In Sierra Leone, my school days were the best period of my life. Every morning all the classes got together, we swam and then we each went to our different classes. At break time we went cycling, or played football, or we told each other stories about long ago while sitting in the sun. There were lots of nice things that I cannot write about now, but I think that they were just like everybody else's school day.

On holidays, the people danced in the streets, everyone wore their best clothes and people ate at their neighbours' houses in order to watch the matches between the two best football teams of Sierra Leone, the Eastern Lions and Black Pool. I was an Eastern Lions fan. When we won, we danced in the streets.

When I was in Sierra Leone, I thought that I could become a lawyer. But when I was in the fourth form, some rebels came over the border from Liberia and started a war. They called themselves the RUF. They said that they wanted to liberate the people in Sierra Leone, but that was not true. When the RUF came to Sierra Leone, the real problems began. They killed people, cut their throats, and cut off people's hands and women's breasts. They burned the rich people's houses and stole everything. Sometimes the soldiers did these things too. I saw the people who had been killed on the streets by the rebels.

Village life, Sierra Leone

Photo: Jan Saudi Panos Pictures

2 Family and friends

My grandmother in Zaïre

Daly Kalumga (UK)

My grandmother's name is Bibi Mariam. She is in Zaïre. She is 60 years old. She has short hair. She is tall and the same colour as me.

My grandmother is very important to me because she looked after me when I was younger and taught me many things. She was kind and thoughtful. She was the most important person in my life. When I had problems, she helped me. When I needed someone to talk to, she listened.

First, I lived with my mother and grandmother in Zaïre. My mother worked in a shop in a town in the region of Shaba. When my mum went to work, I stayed with my grandmother who sold things like food from our doorstep. After a couple of years my mother wanted to go and live in Kinshasa, the capital of Zaïre. She asked me if I wanted to go with her but as I really loved my grandmother I didn't want to go with my mum. I stayed with my grandmother.

When I was six years old my grandmother enrolled me in a Catholic school. It was when I was in the second year at school that my grandmother became ill, seriously ill, close to dying. There was nobody to help us because my grandmother only had two children. Both were in Kinshasa. During the night, my grandmother's illness became worse. I started to cry. My grandmother begged me, saying, 'Don't cry my child.' I still cried. Then my grandmother made me light an oil lamp, saying 'Go to our neighbours and tell them your grandmother is very ill.' That was during the night, about three o'clock in the morning. I went out alone. I went to our neighbour's house. I told them my grandmother was ill. They came to our house. In the morning they took her to the hospital. After some weeks she began to feel a little better.

I can't forget my grandmother, she is my life.

My uncle

Suzana Osmani (UK)

My uncle is 33 years old. He works as a factory quality controller. He lives in Kosovo (in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia). He is tall, with short black hair. I look a little bit like him. He is very good at volleyball, and he wanted to teach me to play it, but I preferred playing tennis.

My uncle is kind, funny and helpful. He teaches me things I didn't know and we listen to each other. Once, we went to a swimming pool at a place called Malisheve and had a very good time. After the swimming pool we went to a forest with a river. I had never seen a river like that – the water was so clean and you could see everything down there. I also used to visit our friends with him, and we used to go to his volleyball club and go shopping together. Sometimes when his friends played football we used to go and watch them.

Now I am in Britain I phone him every three months and talk to him for about 20 minutes. Every time I speak to him he always asks me if I have a boyfriend and if he is black or white. And I always say, 'I have a white boyfriend and a black one, a yellow boyfriend, a red boyfriend and a green boyfriend!'

My uncle is important to me because he is like my parents, and when I was in Kosovo I used to stay with him a lot.

My mother

Rahima Sheikl (UK)

The most important person in my life is my mum. She is 35 years old and she is fun and good to talk to. My mum is in Somalia and I haven't seen her for two years. I always dream of her and I often think of her. Luckily, I have at least got her picture to look at.

My mum sends me letters from Somalia, but when she wants to send me a letter it takes ages because there aren't any post offices in Somalia. She gives the letters to another person who is coming to Britain to give to me. But the person with the letter usually goes to many other countries before they come to Britain, which is why it takes ages for the letters to arrive.

My mum and my sister

Lul Ugas (UK)

I am going to talk about my mum. Her name is Mariam and she is 33 years old. She lives in Mogadishu in Somalia but I don't really know where she is now. I don't really know her very well now.

My mum has got long hair with a kind face. When I lived with her I was so happy. We used to go somewhere every weekend like the zoo or the swimming pool. She used to take care of me and all my brothers and sisters. I remember when I got angry she used to make me happy again.

My youngest sister is called Layla Ugas. She is 14 years old now and she is in Somalia with my mum. I remember when we used to play together in Somalia. Now I don't have anybody to play with like she used to. I also remember when all my family went to the beach and swam and I played with Layla and my other brothers and sisters.

Layla was a shy girl and she was always happy. She used to help me when I was cleaning the house. She was a beautiful girl but I am afraid I am never going to see her again, because I don't have anybody to help them come here.

My uncle

Mohamed El Khamsi (Netherlands)

My uncle is 32 years old. His name is Mohammed El Khamsi. He was the most important person in my life, after my mother and my father. He is like an older brother to me, because when I was little, he took care of me. Since my father was here in the Netherlands and I was in Morocco, he made sure that I got a good education, as did my mother.

Sometimes we went to the swimming pool, played football or went picnicking in the mountains. Sometimes he taught me to draw, because he was an artist.

I miss him because I haven't seen him in two years. He will always be the most important person in my life, after my parents.

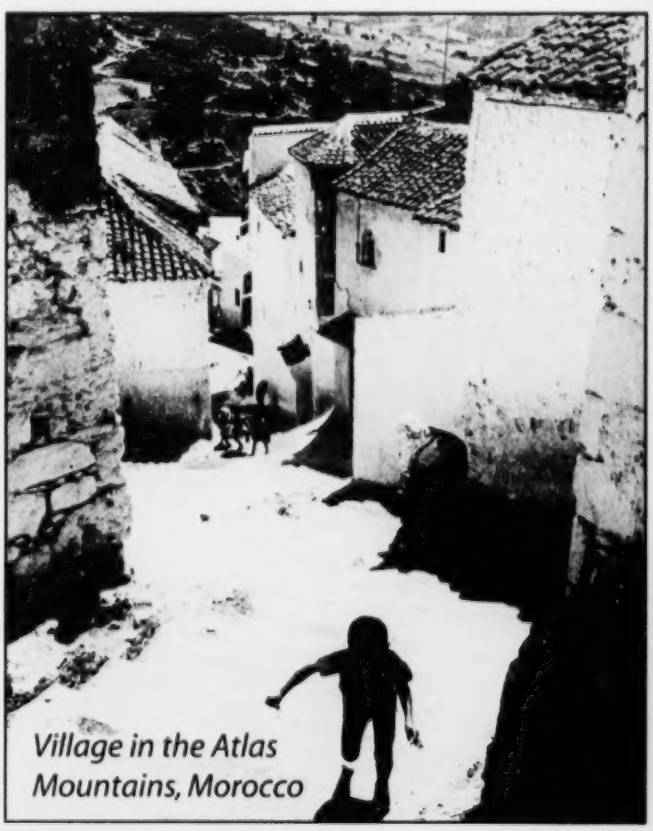


Photo: Sean Sprague Panos Pictures

Village in the Atlas Mountains, Morocco

Important people

Selam Samuel (UK)

I love my mum and dad and I miss them. They are important for me because they brought me into this world. They took me to school. Especially my mum: even if she is dead she will always be important because she helped me and looked after me.

Abraham Esthifanos is a singer, the best singer. I feel happy when I hear his songs which are really wonderful. I think he is important because he sings songs about the war which remind me of my family.

My friend Rahwa is 15 years old. She is in Asmara. She is important to me because we were like two sisters. We used to talk about everything, and understand each other. We also used to go out and have fun. I really miss her.

My friend Aida is 23 years old. She lives in London. She is important to me because she reminds me of my friend Rahwa, and with Aida I can talk about everything. I feel comfortable with her.

I think friends at schools are important because some of them are refugees like me and sometimes when I feel depressed they are able to share my feelings because they can understand me, and when I talk to them about my problem I feel better.

My mother

Mamadou Seck (Netherlands)

(A dream)

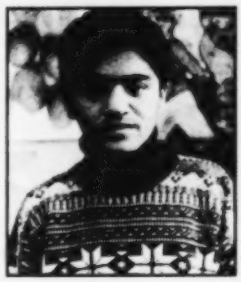
I saw my mother again suddenly.
After so many years, my mother:
Where was it and when?
My mother ... oh, my mother!
Just like then?

That time I was lost in the fog
And she found me. There I stood,
I saw her standing there.
Home in a dark house,
Panic: no light. I am late!
No, don't walk away. You came suddenly
Back from the fog.
Before you go away forever,
Before I myself dissolve in the fog.

I saw my mother again suddenly.

Important people

Ibrahim Dogus (UK)



My brother is 13 years old. He studies at George Orwell School as well. He is a very clever boy but sometimes he doesn't listen to me. But he is very important for me because I need to keep him safe and look after him. I try to tell him about good and bad things for our people. I don't want him to be a bad boy.

All my neighbours from Adana in Turkey are important to me. They are older than me but they've got children the same age as me. They are very good friends to me. Some of them are dead now, but many of them are alive. If we needed any help they would come to us, and if they needed any help we would go to help them.

My uncle is a guerrilla [fighter]. He lives in the mountains. I don't know if he is alive or dead. I can't get news of him. He is important for me because eight or nine years ago he used to come to our house sometimes. At that time I was eight years old. If I talked then he listened to me. He made me feel important.

Yilmaz Guney is a Kurdish film-maker. He lived in Turkey. When he started to make films he made many enemies. [Over] one film he fought with a Turkish judge. If I watch his films I see myself and my people's lives. He died in 1984.

My mother

Michell Diallo (Netherlands)

My mother is the most important person in my life because she has done so much to raise me. When she was pregnant with me, she suffered a great deal of pain. When I was born, the pain was worse.

Sometimes she had to beat me, but she in her turn was beaten by my father. When I was hungry, my mother gave me her breasts. When my friends hit me, I went to her. When I was happy, my mother was happy too. When I was sad, so was she.

My mother taught me to walk, to eat, to drink, to laugh, to dress myself. My mother taught me everything. My mother was always happy with me. That is why she was so important to me. I can forget anything else, but I will never forget my mother. That is why I dream of her every night.

My uncle in Colombia

Rafael Ayala Silva (UK)

I remember my uncle. He is my godfather too. His name is Jesus Silva. Until I was five he would bring a sweet for me every day. My uncle was a student at the University of Cali studying sociology and history. My uncle was the only one who worried about me and my future.

He liked street theatre and helping the actors. When I was little he took me to see the street theatre and I learned about life from this – the life of the city. One day I woke up and my cousin said that my uncle wasn't there. She was crying and saying he'd been taken away. I didn't understand why at the time. My uncle spent four years in and out of jail. This was because my uncle was trying to get money for a socialist group to defend the rights of artists and students. This is why he is a hero. He was on demonstrations and on a hunger strike against the state.

My family and I really admire my uncle. This is the reason he is so special for me. Although he has been away from my family for so long, every time I read a book, watch TV or listen to music, my uncle is always there for me.

My mother

Lisa Addison (Netherlands)

My mother's name is Hannah. She is 43 years old. She has short hair, and her skin colour is a little bit lighter than mine. She is also shorter than I am. Everyone says that I look a lot like her, but I cannot see it. My mother looks really young for her age because sometimes people think that she is my sister. If we go to a party and someone wants to dance with me then she gets aggressive. My mother has taught me lots of things about life, about sex and men and about how a lady should behave. Sometimes my mother doesn't listen to me: she wants to have her own way all the time. I love her anyway.

My mother is very important to me because she takes care of my clothes and food, and everything. I think my mother is a real superwoman because I have three brothers and she raised us all by herself, because when I was three years old my father went to Ghana.

I really do have a lovely mother, and I wouldn't want her any different.

Photo: Paul Smith/Panos Pictures

Colombian musical group

3 Life in a new country

My life in the Netherlands

Rehman Mohammed (Netherlands)

I come from Pakistan, and I am a Pakistani citizen. I am also a Muslim. My skin colour is brown.

If other people had to describe me, they might say that I am stupid, and they would say that I am no good and that I have a big mouth. They would also say that I am annoying. I am proud of myself when I get a good school report, and then my whole family is happy.

The best thing about being in the Netherlands is that I am at a very good school and that I have found some work and that there are lots of teachers who are nice to me and are pleased to help me, and I think that is really great. The difficult things about being in the Netherlands are as follows: when I go into the city I see people with hardly any clothes on, and I have to travel really far to go to the mosque.

My parents have their opinions about life in the Netherlands too. First (positive), my father has found a good job here and has a roof over his head. In addition, Dutch money is worth a lot in Pakistan. Second (negative), my parents do not like people wearing so little clothing. And when my parents wear their own clothes, the Dutch people look at them as if they are criminals. My parents are afraid that we will get into trouble every time we leave the house. They say that we have to stay at home.

I hardly ever have problems with my parents because we think the same way. But if a problem does arise, it is usually about school, language, or going out. After a day or two the problems usually get sorted out on their own.

My image of the Netherlands

Christiana Kwarteng (Netherlands)

I had a lot of ideas about the Netherlands before I arrived here. I thought that the Dutch were all blond, and that it was a big country. I thought that the people talked German, lived freely, were rich, and that it would be difficult to find work in the Netherlands. I thought that the people were friendly, that Amsterdam was a big and beautiful city, that the Dutch made aeroplanes and that it was an industrialized country.

I was right about some things and very wrong about some other ones. Some people discriminate and there is also a lot of unemployment. Only some people have blond hair. There are lots of homes for older people. I don't think that is good. Lots of young people don't have any respect for the older people and that is not how it is in my country.

Life in Britain

Ruth Teklab (UK)

In Britain I like the freedom because we can move around more freely. We don't need to carry identification papers.

I left Eritrea when I was seven and went to Sudan. At that time Eritrea was not free because the president used to kill a lot of people. People didn't go out a lot because they were afraid of being killed. People had to be back home by six o'clock in the evening because there was a curfew. If you were later than six, soldiers would tell you to stop. If you didn't stop, the soldiers would kill you. If you did stop, they would take you to prison. This is why I like the freedom here.

Life in Britain

Selam Samuel (UK)

I like having friends because friends help me to speak English and learn the meaning of some new words. The more you have friends who speak English, the more you learn from them. But I don't like forgetting my language, Tigrinya, because your own language is more important than anything else; speaking your own language means not forgetting your nationality.

I love my foster family in Britain. I have a wonderful family. I wanted only love and support and I got much more than I was expecting. My foster brothers and sisters take me to different places that I can enjoy, like youth clubs, funfairs and the seaside. I don't like being alone here because I feel bored and I start thinking about my own family and I feel sick that I haven't got any family left.

I like watching TV like Home and Away, Neighbours, Eastenders and Brookside, because I understand what the people in them say and they teach me something new or something that my family can't explain.

I like my school because I have a lot of support in my English class and other classes.

Brighton Beach

Photo: Sally Lancaster Photofusion

I like the freedom I have in London most of the time. If I want to go out on Saturdays, I can go but in Eritrea I couldn't even go out to my friend's house.

I don't like English food because I only eat hot, spicy food back home and if I eat English food I feel as though I haven't eaten anything. I don't like the traffic in London because it is too busy. I don't like the weather because it is too cold in winter. In Eritrea it doesn't rain that much but here it rains even in summer.

Eating chips

Photo: Sally Lancaster Photofusion

Britain

Nesli Kilic (UK)

In Britain, I like London because it is a nice city. I like my school because they teach me a lot of English and I like TV because it is helping me to learn a lot of English. I like school dinners because every day we have chips. I like Liverpool because they are good at playing football. And I like being away from fighting in Turkey.

But I don't like some lessons at school because they are very boring. I don't like not understanding people because I don't know enough English. I don't like the weather because it is very cold, and in summer it is cold.

I don't like some people here. They are stupid, because they say, 'Go home. Why have you come here?' They don't understand that I am a refugee from Turkey and I can't go home.

The Netherlands in my eyes

Ayse Akpinar (Netherlands)

Buses, metros and trams are different from in my country. The weather is very different from many other countries. Here it is cold and draughty, but Amsterdam is a most beautiful city.

In my country, when someone is a tourist everybody keeps on staring until the person leaves because there aren't very many tourists in Turkey.

In my country you cannot say that you don't know what religion you are because people will laugh. Dutch people have very different characters from Turkish people. Dutch people look at you angrily if you talk too loudly, but if you know them you can tell they are nice people. The Netherlands is a democratic country, and I think that is the best of all.

Trams in Amsterdam

Photo: Mark Henley/Impact

Winter in London

Photo: Robert Brook/Photofusion

Britain

Ibrahim Dogus (UK)

In Britain, I like learning English because I need to use English for speaking to people. I like TV because it is helping me to learn a lot of English. I like my new friends because they help me in school and outside school. I also like being away from fighting because I don't like fighting.

But I don't like the traffic because I'm often late for school and I don't like the weather because it is colder than Turkey. I don't like English food because it is different to the Kurdish food I eat at home.

I don't like the racism in Britain because I think all people are equal. I also don't like not understanding people. I often don't understand the words people say so I just have to look at their face.

Watching television at home

Photo: Bob Watkins/Photofusion

In Britain

Suzana Osmani (UK)

In Britain I like the food I have tasted so far. I like TV because there are good programmes. I like Home and Away, Brookside, Eastenders and Blind Date. You can learn more English if you watch TV.

I like learning English because it is important to me now and many people speak English in other countries. Everybody likes the English language. I like school because in my country, Kosovo, school is just in the morning but in London it is in the morning and the afternoon. I like going to school in the afternoon as well. I like the teachers here but sometimes I don't understand when the teacher explains to the whole class, but in classes where there are two teachers they explain to me slowly and I understand very well. I like music at school because it is my favourite subject. I have some cassettes of Albanian music at home and I listen to them every day when I come back from school and I like the words of the songs.

In Britain, I don't like being alone because I was alone when I first came to George Orwell School. Those days were very bad for me because none of the students talked to me because I didn't speak English. Although I like to speak English, I don't like forgetting my own language, Albanian, because it is my language and I love to speak with people in my language.

In the Netherlands

Abida Ben Yaich (Netherlands)

I love the freedom, because that's important for a happy life.
I love school, because in order to improve my future, I must understand the language.
I love my house, because I live there with my family.
I love having contact with Dutch people, because I enjoy talking to people in a foreign language.
I love to watch TV, because there are good TV programmes.

I do not like the weather, because it is always cold and cloudy.
I do not like the food, because it is not healthy, and chips alone are not enough.
I do not like racism, because there is no difference between people: black or white, rich or poor.
I do not like some school subjects, because they are difficult for me.
I do not like being alone, because I always want to stay with my family.

Life in Britain

Daly Kalumga (UK)

I like English food because it is good for me. I like my school, my lessons and my teachers. I know going to school will help me in the future. I like learning English because it will help me in class or when I go to the shops. I like watching TV because I learn English when I watch cartoons and Home and Away.

The things that I don't like in London are: forgetting my language because one day I will go back to my country. I don't like children under 16 years of age smoking. I don't like the mentality of the students at school. They don't answer the teachers well. In Zaïre we listen when the teachers are talking and so you can understand the lesson.

I don't like racism in Britain because it makes the world unhappy.

In the Netherlands

Ayse Akpinar (Netherlands)

I love Amsterdam, because it is an active, busy city with good restaurants.
I love the teachers, because they are nice:
They do not only think about your work, but also about your problems.
I love to watch TV, because it helps improve my Dutch and English.
I love the Netherlands, because I will be able to find work easily once I have my diploma.
I love Dutch customs, because people know when, how and why everything is organized.

I do not like my school, because it is small and old.
I do not like my house, because it is very small.
I do not like racism and discrimination, because I think that everyone is the same.
I think it is annoying when I forget my own language, because I may return to my own country.
I do not like being alone, because without your friends and family you are lonely.

Free time in London

Ibrahim Dogus (UK)

In my free time I like playing football with my friends. I like reading books and newspapers. I like watching television. When I watch, I'm trying to understand the words to improve my English. I also like going swimming or other places with my brother.

My favourites of all these things are reading books and playing football. If I'm alone and can concentrate, I read books because I really like reading. If I can, I like to get away from my house and read books in very quiet places like parks or my garden.

Football is my second favourite. I play football in school in my free time and sometimes after school. I used to play in a team outside school, but I've left now.

London leisure centre

Photo: C. Stacey Photofusion

4 School

School in Eritrea and England

Selam Samuel (UK)

I went to school in Asmara, capital city of Eritrea, when I was young. I went to an Italian school called Victorio Pottego. I learned Italian and Tigrinya but I learned more Italian writing and reading. My options were maths, science, geography, Italian and Tigrinya. I went to that school until 1995. I really enjoyed going to an Italian school because since I was a child I've always liked to learn different languages.

When I came to England I was really amazed by the way students behaved because in my school back home students were really well behaved. Once we got to our class, we didn't talk unless we had to ask the teacher a question. Otherwise we waited until the end of the lesson. In my school in Eritrea the teachers rushed quickly from one class to another, like they had to catch a train.

In my country, schools are quite good except that many have been destroyed by the war. In my school, classes were quite big – about 40 students – but in England they are quite small – about 20 students. The one thing I like about English schools is that we have dinners, but in Eritrea students have to go home to have dinner. I was really lucky to have my school near my home so it was quite easy for me to walk home.

My school in Zaïre

Daly Kalumga (UK)

My school was called Lycée 3 Kasa-vubu. It was a C'atholic school. It was only for girls and it wasn't very big but it was very popular. There were many students who came from many different [regions]. We wore a uniform of a white top, blue skirt and black plastic sandals.

If you do not wear the uniform you are not allowed to go to school and if the head teacher sees you, you may get into trouble or get sent back home. We had to have short hair (2 cms long) and in a simple style. We weren't allowed to put on make up, to have nail varnish or to wear gold earrings or jewellery. But there was a reason why they did this – because there were some parents who couldn't buy expensive things for their children.

We didn't have free dinners at school. At break time we bought things like bread and butter, ice cream and drink, but not meals. You went to your classroom every day and you didn't move for the lessons – the teachers came to you. If you were late you had to pick up litter or sweep the pavements. Then when you had finished you went to your class and the teacher might tell you to stay outside. If you talked in the classroom you would be punished by the teacher. If the head teacher found you talking in the classroom you got into big trouble. When the head teacher came we had to stand up and say 'Good morning' or 'Good afternoon' to her.

My college in Turkey

Ibrahim Dogus (UK)

I studied in Turkey for nine years. In my last school we had to start at half past eight. My school was bigger than other schools, because it was a college and a secondary school together. In the morning, college students came to school and studied their lessons. In the afternoon the other students came. It was very big with a big playground where all the students played. In class we had 50 or more students. There was strong discipline in class. If the teacher came to the class we had to get up and say 'Good morning, sir' all together. We couldn't talk about anything in the lesson either. If we talked we got a penalty or the teacher smacked us, and I think that's not too bad. Our lessons were very hard. We had school uniform.

In England the education is very slow but they teach very well. My school is very big. Sometimes two teachers come to class – not like Turkey where there were too many students and only a few teachers. In English schools I think there is no discipline. In the lessons all the students talk about different things. They don't listen to their teachers.

School in Turkey and England

Nesli Kilic (UK)

I left my school in Turkey in December 1994 to come to England. My school's name in Turkey was Elbistan Ticaret Lisesi. It was a secondary school. I liked my school but we had strict discipline in Turkey. The teachers were very angry and horrible. When we didn't do work the teachers smacked us.

We stayed in the same classroom for every lesson. We were very quiet. Then the teacher came in and started the lesson. We didn't speak in the classroom. Our lessons in Turkey were the same as in England: maths, English, technology, history, science, art, music, geography – and Turkish.

There were 25–30 children in the class. There were two sections of school – morning (7.30–12.30) and afternoon (1.00–5.30). You just went to one section. We didn't have school dinners because we spent such a small amount of time in school. We had a school uniform. Girls wore a tunic and boys wore trousers and a shirt.

When I started school in England at George Orwell it surprised me a lot because it was very different from my school in Turkey. The teachers and students are very close to each other, like friends. The teachers never hit students. Each lesson we move to a different classroom which is very different to Turkey. In Turkey we had to take our own food but in England the school gives you food for free if you are on Income Support.

My school in Asmara and London

Lidia Thomas (UK)

My last school in Asmara was called Denden. I was learning English, maths, science, geography and technology. The school was far from my house so I went by the number 6 bus. The number 6 was always crowded with lots of people at this time – lots of schoolchildren and people going to work. It took 30 minutes to get to the school. It was a single decker bus and it was white with a red line.

I wore a school uniform – a grey skirt and jumper. Lots of students went to the school. I went to school in the afternoon and other students went to school at 8 am and finished at 12.00.

My teachers were good to us and helped me, but when I came to school without doing my homework they used to punish me by hitting my hands.

I began to learn English when I came to this country in August 1995 and started at George Orwell School. The teachers help me with English. I speak two languages which are similar to Tigrinya and a little bit of English.

Photo: Betty Press Panos Pictures

School in Kosovo and Britain

Suzana Osmani (UK)

I come from Kosovo in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. I speak Albanian. In Kosovo I went to secondary-school. The school was called Bajram Curri. I studied maths, English, science, music, history, geography, Albanian, P.E. and art. School was from 8.00 am to 1.30 pm and 2.00 pm to 4.30 pm. Years 1, 2, 3 and 4 went to school from 2.00 pm to 4.30 pm and Years 5, 6, 7 and 8 went to school from 8.00 am to 1.30 pm. My school was not very big like schools in London, although it was quite big compared to other schools in Kosovo.

There were about 32 people in my class. We didn't wear uniform. It was a mixed school for boys and girls. In my old school there were many Albanian and some Serb students. In my London school there are people from many, many countries. For example, I have friends from Eritrea, Turkey, Zaïre and South America. They are all learning English. All the lessons are taught in English.

In my school in London the teachers help the students a lot but in Kosovo they didn't help so much. The teachers were very strict so the students behaved well. Sometimes in London the students behave badly and make too much noise.

School in Somalia, Yemen and Britain

Lul Ugas (UK)

I did not go to school in Somalia. My brother went to school there. He said that school began at 7.30 am and finished at 1.30 pm. There was no lunch at the school. In the afternoon sometimes he played and sometimes he did homework. He learned to read and write in Somali. He learned maths, the history of Somalia and the Koran.

Small children go to school in the morning in Somalia. Older children go to school in the afternoon from 1.30 pm to 4.00 pm. You have to pay to go to school, and you have to buy paper and everything else. My brother told me that he enjoyed going to school.

I went to school for one year in Yemen. It was an Arabic school. I learned to speak, read and write Arabic. It is now my best language. It was a private school so we had to pay the teacher. There were 10 girls in the class. I didn't like the school very much.

My school in London is George Orwell School. It is a big school but I really like it. We don't have to pay for lessons and we study many subjects. I am learning English with people from many countries. There are boys in this school but I don't mind that. I also have men teachers. I've never had men teachers before.

I am happy here. I feel free and I enjoy school.

Schoolgirls, Mogadishu, Somalia

5 Aspects of identity: culture, language and religion

Living in two worlds

Mohamed El Khamsi (Netherlands)

My name is Mohamed El Khamsi. I am 16 years old and I am a Muslim. This is because I come from an Arab country where religion is very important. I am a Moroccan citizen. My skin colour is different from my mother's, more like my father's, which is brown.

I sometimes have problems with my parents, just like other Moroccan boys and girls. When I go swimming, for example, I get in trouble with my father. There are two reasons for this. The first is my religion, Islam, and the second has to do with Moroccan culture. My father says that Islam forbids swimming and that it is not part of our culture. At first I did not like that, but after I thought about it I decided that it was right. I am proud of being a Muslim.

Religion in my life

Mamadou Seck (Netherlands)

I come from Mauritania, and my religion is Islam. I believe in God. My religion teaches me that I must go to the mosque to pray, that I must memorize the Koran, that I must talk about my faith, and listen to the sermons at the mosque.

My religion has too many rules and requirements for me to describe them all. I keep some of them, but not all of them. I take my religion pretty seriously. The holidays that are part of my religion are Ramadan and Eid ul-Fitr. We celebrate that every year. There were no other religions in my native country, but I approve of other people's ideas, because everybody has their own religion. The place that religion has in my life is open right now. That is different from how it was in my own country. Here I cannot go to the mosque every Friday.

I talk about religion with my friends. We talk about all the important things that God has said.

Appearance

Nasba Shaheen (Netherlands)

I am 17 years old, 1.56 metres tall and I weigh 52 kilos. I have long, straight, black hair and dark brown eyes. In England, where I was born, I mostly wore a uniform at school and jeans at home. Now I wear a *shalwar kameez* – Pakistani dress – because I do not have to wear a uniform here in the Netherlands. When I first came to school here I saw that all the Pakistani girls were in *shalwar kameez*, so I started to dress that way too.

I do not wear any jewellery such as earrings, rings and necklaces because I do not like the way they feel and I always feel different when I wear jewellery. I also do not use any make up because if I have make up on one day, but not the next, I will look ugly when I do not wear any make up. I think that the natural look is much better.

I always wear the same clothes, except for sometimes, at weddings, for example. My mother and my family decide what I should wear, but I always agree with them. I choose my clothes myself and sometimes with my mother. My religion plays an important role in what I wear. According to my religion, nobody is allowed to see my body.

Money is also important when I buy clothes. I cannot buy any expensive clothes. Mostly I get my clothes from Pakistan or England because clothes are cheaper in Pakistan, and you can buy Pakistani clothes easily in England because there are more Pakistani stores there.

The clothes that I wear have to show that I am a member of a certain group, that is Pakistani and Muslim. They have to be comfortable, beautiful and of good quality.

My appearance

Abida Ben Yaich (Netherlands)

In Morocco, where I was born, I wore a skirt, dress or jeans, and sometimes a *jellaba* – that is a big dress. In the Netherlands, I wear jeans with a sweater and jacket because it is so cold here.

I wear earrings, a watch, a necklace and rings as accessories. I do not wear any make up, only at parties, because my parents will not allow me to wear any make up until I get married. I do not like to have lots of make up on my face, such as red lipstick.

I almost always wear the same kinds of clothes, except that in the summer I sometimes wear a dress or skirt with a T-shirt and a blouse.

Religion plays a role in what I wear. If you are really Muslim you are not allowed to wear any trousers, only a skirt or dress with long sleeves and a headscarf. I do not wear long skirts and a headscarf, not because I am not really Muslim, but because of the future. How can I wear a headscarf and long skirts at work when I am actually expected to wear trousers or a short skirt?

Money plays a role in the clothes that I wear. When I have enough money to buy beautiful clothes, I wear modern clothes, but even if I do not have enough money, I make sure that I am dressed nicely.

Religion in my life

Masood Begzad (Netherlands)

I come from Afghanistan, and my religion is Islam. I believe in God. My religion teaches me that I must not steal or kill, and that I must do good in society. The rules and requirements that are part of my religion are: to pray, to go to the house of God, and, if you have lots of money, to help poor people.

I do all of this. Sometimes I help poor people, because we are all human and we need to help each other. I do not take my religion too seriously because some of the duties are very difficult. In other words, if you carry out all your duties you cannot enjoy life any more. The holidays that are part of my religion include Eid ul-Fitr and Eid ul-Adha. We celebrate those two holidays together with our neighbours, friends and family members.

In my native country there were different sects of Islam. In my own country, sometimes people fight about religion because they do not have enough understanding of each other.

I do not talk to anybody about religion. It does not seem so important for Dutch people.

Language in my life

Zacharia Wurie (Netherlands)

My native language is Creole. I learned to speak the language from my mother and father and I learned to write at school. I can also talk and write many other languages such as English, Dutch, Temne and German.

I learned English at school. When I got to the Netherlands I learned Dutch. I learned Temne at home and at school, and as German is a subject I had at school, I understand a little bit.

My native language is very important to me because I understand someone so quickly in that language. I often talk my own language with people from my country. We can understand each other well and we don't forget where we came from.

We talk about the government, politics, war and how we can solve these problems, because safety is very important in my country. I read newspapers, stories and books, and I also write stories and letters. I will always take care to maintain my native language because I think that it is beautiful and important.

I like my classes here in the Netherlands a lot. I try to improve my Dutch by reading magazines, newspapers, stories and books that I borrow from the library. If I stay in the Netherlands for more than 50 years I will have to think before I talk, or use a dictionary, in order to write a letter in my own language.

If I have children in the Netherlands, they will have be taught to read and write my native language because it will be easier for them to live in my native country when we go back.

I live with my uncle and aunt. My uncle has been living here for almost five years, but he cannot yet read or write good Dutch; my aunt can. Sometimes I talk Dutch with their daughter and she speaks very good Dutch. She helps me with my homework a lot.

Language in my life

Nermin Avdic (Netherlands)

My native language is Bosnian (Serbo-Croat). I learned the language from my parents, and I learned to write at school. I had five years of English at school, and I can also speak a little German.

My native language is important to me, just like it is for everyone. I speak my native language with my family and with some friends. Some of these people cannot speak any Dutch which makes it easier when we speak our own language.

I talk about the same things in my language as I do in Dutch, only sometimes I talk about Bosnia more in my language. I only write letters in my language. And I only read newspapers in my language, because I cannot find any books in my language in the Netherlands.

I don't try very hard to keep up my native language, because I talk Dutch practically the whole day long, but I won't forget my language. In the beginning, Dutch was a bit difficult for me, but not any more. I do my best to improve my Dutch. It depends on how many contacts I have in my native language. If I stay in the Netherlands for a long time, for example, then I might not have any more contact with people who speak my language. But I never want to forget my mother tongue.

If I am still living in the Netherlands when I have children, as far as I am concerned, they can choose for themselves what language they want to talk and write in. But it would be even better if they could also speak my native language. And I think that this depends on who you marry. If, for example, I marry a Dutch girl who cannot speak my language, then we will only be able to talk Dutch.

My parents can speak a little Dutch. They have been on a course, and they have a lot of contact with Dutch people. Though sometimes I have to help them by translating – at the doctor's, for example. They think it is very important that I learn good Dutch.

Religion in my life

Nermin Avdic (Netherlands)

I come from Bosnia and my religion is Islam. I believe in Allah. My religion teaches me that I must not steal or lie, that I must always tell the truth, that I must be nice to people, and so on. The rules and duties that are part of my religion are: I must not eat pork, I must not drink alcohol and I must pray five times a day. I do not do this because I do not have enough time. I do not follow my religion strictly: I do not take part in Ramadan, and I do not pray five times a day.

In Bosnia there are lots of Muslims who believe in God, but they do not follow all the rules. For example, some people drink lots of alcohol and hardly ever go to the mosque, but they call themselves Muslims. That was how I was raised. When I was in my own country, I only knew that I had an Islamic name, but I hardly ever went to the mosque, and I had never taken part in Ramadan.

What I have learned from my parents is that I must never lie or eat pork, and that's all. That is how my parents were raised too: my father hardly ever goes to the mosque either. He drinks alcohol with his friends occasionally, and he doesn't take part in Ramadan either. My mother does not wear a headscarf.

Now that there is a war, however, there are lots of people who think that the war is a punishment from God because they had almost forgotten their religion. And there are lots of people who have changed: now they believe in God and go to the mosque. But it was not always like that.

Religion in my life

Christiana Kwarteng (Netherlands)

I come from Ghana and my religion is Christianity. I believe in Jesus Christ. My religion teaches me that Jesus was born on Christmas Day, and that is why the Christians celebrate Christmas every year as the most important day in the Christian calendar. The other important holiday is Easter, when Jesus was killed.

The rules and duties that are part of my religion are: love your neighbour as yourself, do not lie, do not speak ill of your friends, and do not take any false idols. I follow these rules because I love my religion and I must do as God wills. I take my religion very seriously because I respect it.

In my country there were other religions: Islam, a little bit of Buddhism and people who believed in all sorts of things. I respected those people's ideas because it was what they believed in.

Religion has a different place in my life now than it did in my own country because I take it more seriously here in the Netherlands. I talk about religion with my family and friends. We talk about the Bible and Jesus. Religion is not very important to the Dutch.

Religion in my life

Mohamed El Khamsi (Netherlands)

I come from Morocco, and that country is part of the larger Islamic world and Africa. That is why I am a Muslim. I believe in only one God, Allah, and that Mohammed is his prophet. Moreover, my religion teaches me that I need to treat people fairly and that I must not lie. According to Islam there are five duties:

1. Saying out loud that Allah is the only God and that Mohammed is his prophet.
2. Praying five times a day facing the holy city of Mecca.
3. Giving alms to the poor and infirm.
4. During Ramadan, the month of fasting, abstaining from eating and drinking between sunrise and sunset.
5. If you can, making a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in your life and paying homage to God.

There are also other rules. If you are a Muslim you are not allowed to eat any pork or drink alcohol. It is also forbidden to make images of people or animals. But the first five rules are the most important.

Actually, I carry out the second duty every day and the first duty I carry out all the time, the fourth one too, but the third my father does for me because I do not have any money yet. I am going to do the fifth one when I have saved enough money. I take my religion very seriously because I want to go to *genet* (heaven).

I think that Islam is a lot like Judaism and Christianity. Just like Jews and Christians, Muslims also have a holy book, the Koran, and Muslims get together in a building, the mosque, to pray to God, especially on Fridays. In my own country, the only religion I know of is Islam.

I talk about religion with my family, with friends and in the mosque with the Imam and other Muslims.

6 The future

My future

Phimsiri Ruangkham (Netherlands)

When I graduate from school I want to work in a hospital.

I have a boyfriend. His name is Danny. He is Dutch, and is almost 18 years old, like me. If he loves me and takes good care of me, then I want to marry him. We want to have three children, if it works out. Later, we want to live in Thailand, but that will take a long time. First I need to finish studying, then I want to get a job in the Netherlands and work for a few years. Then we can go to Thailand. We want to have good jobs and a house that is big enough for the children.

The most important thing for us is not riches but happiness, pleasure and success.

My future

Mauricio Parra Ramirez (UK)

In the future I will go to college. I want to study English for one or two years and then I will study architecture or graphic design. When I finish I want to work for myself. My dream is to design a building.

I think I don't want to go back to my country because in England I have got many opportunities for work. I want to be someone important – for myself – and I want my mother to be proud of me. Maybe after 10 or 15 years I will go back to my country, Colombia, to see the people who are very important to me and then I will remember the past and we will share good moments together. But I am not going to stay in Colombia. When I finish my studies and get a good job I want to get married to a good woman and have a family.

My future

Suzana Osmani (UK)

I'm leaving school next month. After the summer holiday I would like to go to college and study business, computers and English. I would really like to work in an office and be a businesswoman.

I would like to go home one day to Kosovo. I am waiting to hear when my country is free. Meanwhile I would like to stay here in London. I have been in London for two years. Sometimes I feel like London is my country. But sometimes when I talk to my family about going back to Kosovo, I feel sad, because I can't go back. Although I have a lot of friends here, when we talk about staying here forever, I feel sad because I would like to go back to my family and my old friends. We have to go back one day when my country is free because Kosovo is where I belong.

If I do go back to my country I would like to work in an office. Or maybe I would be a teacher, teaching students English. Or I would like to teach people how to use the computer.

My future

Ibrahim Dogus (UK)

I am leaving school next month. I am going to continue my education. I will be going to a sixth form centre to study EAL and subjects such as biology, chemistry, maths and French. When I finish the sixth form centre – with A levels I hope – I would like to study at university. I am interested in biology and physics. We need these subjects to know what is going on [in space] and in the world. After university I want my job to be in England.

I don't want to go back to my country now, because there are many problems. If things were better then I would think about going back to my country. I think my heart will always be in Kurdistan but my future is more important than my heart. Anyway, if I get skills and qualifications then I can go back to my country and I can help people by teaching my skills to them.

My future

Daly Kalumga (UK)

I am leaving school next month. Then I hope to go to college to study more French because maybe one day I will return to Zaïre and I will need to speak French. I would also like to study maths and business. I would like to continue learning English because it is going to help me study and understand the lessons and help other people.

After college I would like to go to university and continue to study business because my dream for the future is to work in a bank or a big company. My grandmother always said she wanted me to become a doctor but I would find it hard as I am squeamish.

When I finish my education I would like to get a nice job. I could happily live in England if all the people I cared about in Zaïre, like my grandmother, were here. If they don't come, then maybe I will go back to visit them and then come back to England. Or if Zaïre gets much better maybe I will go back there and get a good job.

My future

Nesli Kilic (UK)

In my future I want to go to college. I want to do business studies and I want to learn computers as well. Then I would like to work in a bank.

In Turkey I would like to be a lawyer. But I can't get this job here because my English is not good enough and also it is too difficult.

I don't want to go back to my own country because I like England, the people, the school and the life here. In England people like to help foreign people. Maybe after 15 or 20 years, I will go back to my own country. I will remember the past and I will see my old home and my friends. I will want to see how they have changed. But I want to be a long time in England. It is very different to Turkey and Kurdistan. People in England have more freedom than in my own country.

My future

Rafael Ayala Silva (UK)

I think I'm going to college to study English, sports, computers and performing arts. Also I have to get a job and help my mother. Then I will go to visit Colombia and then when I come back I would like to go to university or get into a ballet company. When I finish university or I am a professional dancer, I want to go back to my country and stay there with my people.

What I would like to happen is to get into a ballet company. Then I can buy a motorcycle, buy a house at the seaside, go to Colombia to visit my family, get a girlfriend, come back to England to get married, and keep working to help my mother and keep my family together. I would like to be a father and teach all that I know to my son.

What perhaps will happen is that when I finish college I will get a job, get some money and then go to Egypt to see the pyramids. I have been attracted to the pyramids because they are the only ones in the world and they are covered with magical meanings. No one really knows who built them or why, so I will try to find out.

If I can go back to Colombia I will join the ELN guerrilla group and fight for my people.

What I really want to do is find out what I really want to do. Not everyone finds out what they really want to do. I hope I will find out and then I will go for it!

My future

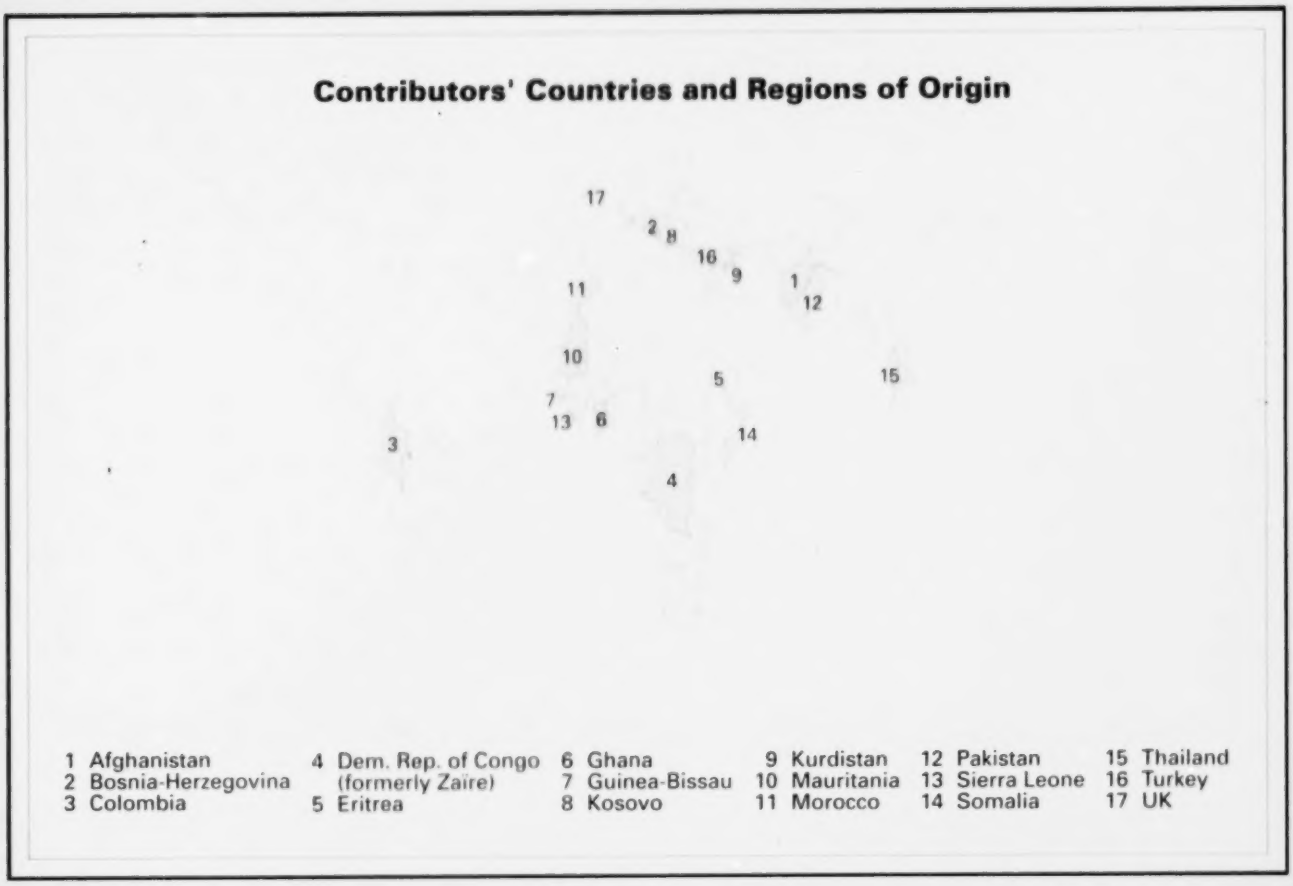
Selam Samuel (UK)

I am leaving school next month. I am hoping to pass my GCSE exams. I went for an interview at City and Islington College and I have been accepted to do leisure and tourism. I am looking forward to carrying on with my studies, [getting] a degree and [having] a job one day.

My other dream is to go back home one day for a visit and see what is going on in my country, Eritrea. I would see if it is a good idea to stay there. If I find that there is a place for me, if things have changed, I would like to play a part in the development of my country. I would like my country to become a peaceful place and I would not like my experience to happen again.

Sometimes I say to myself that if things haven't changed, I will have to stay in England and carry on with my life in London. I think I will feel sad because I won't have a chance to go back. But I think part of me will always be in Eritrea because I belong to that country.

Country and region information



The countries or regions of origin of the contributors are listed below, followed by brief information about each. The information is taken from the *World Directory of Minorities*, edited by MRG and published in 1997. Students could undertake further research on their own or in groups to build up fact files about these countries. GDP (Gross Domestic Product) figures indicate clear economic differences between countries. Minority rights have particular significance for many of the countries listed below and recent tensions and unrest in some of these regions could be explored from that perspective.

• Afghanistan

Land area: 650,000 sq. km
Population: 19.2 million (1995)
Main languages: Pashtu, Dari
Main religions: Islam, Sikhism, Hinduism, Judaism
GDP per person: (US) $800.

• Bosnia-Herzegovina

Land area: 51,130 sq. km
Population: 4.38 million (1992)
Main languages: Serbo-Croat (including Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian)
Main religions: Islam, Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism
GDP per person: Figure not available.

• Colombia

Land area: 1,141,748 sq. km
Population: 35.6 million (1992)
Main languages: Spanish, indigenous languages
Main religions: Christianity (majority Roman Catholic), Judaism, indigenous religions
GDP per person: (US) $5,790.

• Democratic Republic of Congo

(Formerly Zaire)
Land area: 2,344,855 sq. km
Population: 42.5 million (1995)
Main languages: French (official), Lingala, Kikongo, Tshiluba, Swahili
Main religions: Christianity (mainly Roman Catholicism) and traditional beliefs
GDP per person: (US) $300.

• Eritrea

Land area: 93,679 sq. km
Population: 3.3 million (1992)
Main languages: Tigrinya, Afar, Beni Amer, Saho, Arabic
Main religions: Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, Islam
GDP per person: Figure not available.

• Ghana

Land area: 228,533 sq. km
Population: 16 million (1992)
Main languages: English (official), Akan and other indigenous languages
Main religions: Christianity, Animism, Islam
GDP per person: (US) $2,000.

• Guinea-Bissau

Land area: 36,000 sq. km
Population: 1 million (1992)
Main languages: Portuguese (official), Crioulu
Main religions: Animism, Islam
GDP per person: (US) $860.

• Kosovo

Kosovo is a region in Southern Serbia which now makes up part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The majority of the estimated 1,686,661 Albanians who live in Serbia live in Kosovo.

• Kurdistan

The Kurds do not possess a state of their own but live mostly in the mountainous region known as Kurdistan where Iran, Turkey and Iraq meet. About 13 million Kurds live in the 'Turkish' part of Kurdistan.

• Mauritania

Land area: 1,030,700 sq. km
Population: 2.1 million (1992)
Main languages: Arabic, Wolof, Fulani, Tucouleur, Serer, French
Main religion: Islam
GDP per person: (US) $1,610.

• Morocco

Land area: 446,000 sq. km
Population: 27.5 million (1994)
Main languages: Arabic, Berber
Main religion: Islam
GDP per person: (US) $3,270.

• Pakistan

Land area: 796,095 sq. km
Population: 124.9 million (1995)
Main languages: Urdu, Sindhi, Punjabi, Siraiki, Pushtu, Baluchi
Main religions: Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, Ahmadiya
GDP per person: (US) $2,160.

• Sierra Leone

Land area: 72,325 sq. km
Population: 4.5 million (1993)
Main languages: English, Krio, Limba, Mende, Temne
Main religions: Islam, Christianity, Animism
GDP per person: (US) $860.

• Somalia

Land area: 637,657 sq. km
Population: 9.3 million (1995)
Main languages: Somali, Arabic, Gosha
Main religions: Islam, local religions
GDP per person: (US) $712.

• Thailand

Land area: 512,820 sq. km
Population: 61.1 million (1995)
Main languages: Thai (official), Chinese, Malay, various minority languages
Main religions: Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Animism
GDP per person: (US) $5,950.

• Turkey

Land area: 779,452 sq. km
Population: 59.8 million (1993)
Main languages: Turkish (official), Kirmanji and Zaza Kurdish, Laz, Arabic
Main religions: Sunni Islam; Alevism; Greek, Armenian and Suryani Christianity; Judaism
GDP per person: (US) $4,210.

• UK

Land area: 243,368 sq. km
Population: 57.8 million (1994)
Main languages: English, Welsh, Gaelic, Bengali, Chinese, Gujarati, Urdu, Punjabi
Main religions: Christianity (Church of England, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodism, Baptist), Hinduism, Islam
GDP per person: (US) $17,230.

SOME OF THE MAIN LANGUAGES SPOKEN BY THE CONTRIBUTORS:

Albanian, Arabic, Creole, Dari, Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, Kurdish, Lingala, Serbo-Croat, Somali, Spanish, Temne, Thai, Tigrinya, Turkish, Urdu.

Further resources and useful organizations

USEFUL ADDRESSES

Amnesty International
British Section, 99 Rosebery Avenue, London EC1R 4RE Tel. 0171 814 6200

CAFOD
2 Romero Close, London SW9 9TY
Tel. 0171 733 7900

Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR)
Unit 3, Canonbury Yard, 190a New North Road, London N1 7BJ
Tel. 0171 354 0883

Christian Aid
35–41 Lower Marsh, London SE1 7RL
Tel. 0171 620 4444

Council for Education in World Citizenship (CEWC)
15 St Swithin's Lane, London EC4N 8AL Tel. 0171 929 5090

Department for International Development (DFID)
94 Victoria Street, London SW1E 5JL
Tel. 0171 917 7000

Development Education Association (DEA)
3rd Floor, 29–31 Cowper Street, London EC2A 4AP Tel. 0171 490 8108

International Broadcasting Trust (IBT)
2 Ferdinand Place, London NW1 8EE
Tel. 0171 482 2847

Minority Rights Group International
379 Brixton Road, London SW9 7DE
Tel. 0171 978 9498

OXFAM
274 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 7DZ
Tel. 01865 311311

Refugee Council
3 Bondway, London SW8 1SJ
Tel. 0171 820 3000

Save the Children Fund (SCF)
17 Grove Lane, London SE5 8RD
Tel. 0171 703 5400

UNICEF
55 Lincoln Inn Fields, London WC2A 3NB Tel. 0171 405 5592

USEFUL CLASSROOM RESOURCES

The resources listed are all suitable to use with EAL and Key Stage 3 and 4 students.

The materials will help to bring a global dimension to classroom work as well as exploring other issues such as minority rights, refugees and human rights.

Please contact the appropriate agency for details of these and other resources:

Educating for the Future **— World Wildlife Fund (WWF)**
Contains many participative classroom activities for teachers wishing to help young people think in creative and positive ways about the future – from a personal as well as a global perspective. Available from WWF-UK Education Distribution, PO Box 963, Slough SL2 3RS.

Focus for Change **— Reading International Support Centre (RISC)**
This useful pack provides stimulating classroom activities designed to help pupils consider issues such as discrimination and inequalities from the perspectives of gender, race and class. It explores the role of the media in perpetuating negative stereotypes. Contains a set of A4 colour photos to support the activities. Available from RISC, 35–39 London Street, Reading RG1 4PS.

Making Peace **— OXFAM**
Through case studies featuring young people in Bosnia, El Salvador, Israel, Mozambique and Palestine, students are engaged in analyzing the roots of conflict and considering solutions. Available from OXFAM, 274 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 7DZ.

Mapping Our World **— OXFAM**
A good introduction to a critical approach on the study of maps. Encourages young people to consider different ways of looking at maps and boundaries, and provides interesting classroom activities which encourage discussion. Available from OXFAM, 274 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 7DZ.

Refugee Voices **— Channel Four Television**
Targeted at 14–19 year olds, this video gives a first hand account of refugees from Somalia, Kurdistan and other places, and now in British schools, describing the causes of their enforced exile and their sometimes difficult adjustment in their new host society. Available from Channel Four Schools, 01926 436444

Seventy Five—Twenty Five **— Birmingham Development Education Centre (DEC)**
Aimed at students over 16, it provides many useful classroom activities as well as information to encourage young people's understanding of global inequalities. Available from DEC, 998 Bristol Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 6LE.

Voices **— Minority Rights Group International (MRG)**
These are dual language collections of autobiographical writings by refugees (children and adults) from Angola, Eritrea, Kurdistan, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda and Zaïre living in the UK. The series provides excellent support for teachers tackling issues such as human rights, discrimination and migration. Available from MRG, 379 Brixton Road, London SW9 7DE.

We Left Because We Had To **— Refugee Council**
A very useful classroom resource which challenges many negative stereotypes about refugees and engages pupils in a variety of classroom activities. It also provides information on the world refugee situation. Available from the Refugee Council, 3 Bondway, London SW8 1SJ.

What is a Family? **— Birmingham Development Education Centre (DEC)**
A photo pack featuring different family groupings. The pack consists of a set of A3 black and white photos and related activities which encourage young people to think about family structures and relationships. The activities are particularly useful for language development. Available from DEC, 998 Bristol Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham B29 6LE.

Education materials published by MRG

Voices from Angola, Sudan, Uganda and *Zaïre*
Four dual language books, including activity leaflets for classroom use. Key Stages 2, 3 and 4.

Voices from Eritrea, Somalia and *Kurdistan*
Three dual language books. Key Stages 2, 3 and 4.

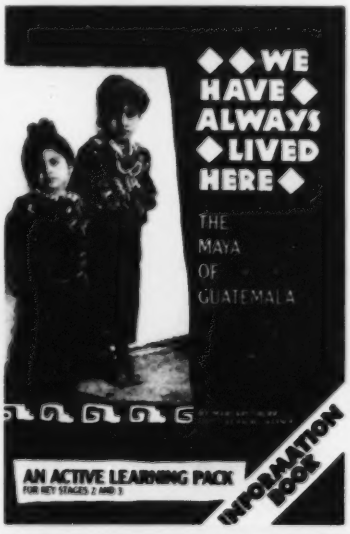
Voices are dual language collections of autobiographical writing by refugees – children and young adults – now living in Britain. They are fully illustrated with photographs and children's drawings, and include comprehensive country introductions.

Voices from Angola, 1995, 1 897693 95 8, 32pp, £2.95/US$5.95
Voices from Sudan, 1995, 1 897693 01 X, 32pp, £2.95/US$5.95
Voices from Uganda, 1995, 1 897693 06 0, 32pp, £2.95/US$5.95
Voices from Zaïre, 1995, 1 897693 11 7, 40pp, £2.95/US$5.95
Voices from Angola, Sudan, Uganda and *Zaïre* (pack of four titles), 1 897693 90 7, £10.95/US$18.00

Voices from Eritrea, 1991, 0 946690 82 0, 32pp, £2.95/US$5.95
Voices from Kurdistan, 1991, 0 946690 84 7, 20pp, £2.95/US$5.95
Voices from Somalia, 1991, 0 946690 83 9, 28pp, £2.95/US$5.95
Voices from Eritrea, Somalia and *Kurdistan* (pack of three titles), 0 946690 81 2, £7.95/US$15.00

Bangladesh is My Motherland by Rachel Warner
A case study of Bengali and English language development and use among a group of Bengali pupils in Britain.
1992, 0 946690 96 0, 28pp, £3.95/US$5.95

We Have Always Lived Here: The Maya of Guatemala by Margaret Burr
Key Stages 2, 3 and 4.
An active learning pack covering Mayan daily life, discrimination, repression and human rights issues. The pack includes an information book, 20 black and white photocards, a pupils' activity book, teachers' notes, and a booklet of work on Guatemala undertaken by a London school.
1991, 0 946690 85 5, £7.95/US$15.00



Minority Rights: Do the Right Thing by Rachel Warner
Key Stages 3 and 4.
A leaflet which answers the question 'What can I do to support minorities?' by giving details of projects carried out by young people in Britain.
1992, 6pp., 10 copies for £2.00/US$5.00 (plus postage).

First They Came for the Jews ... The Legacy of Pastor Niemoeller
Key Stages 3 and 4.
A pack comprising an 8-page leaflet on Pastor Niemoeller, a two-colour poster of the poem 'First they came for the Jews...', and a postcard of the poem.
1992, 0 946690 94 4, £1.50/US$3.95

Also available:
Text of the poem 'First they came for the Jews...'.
Poster of the poem, A2, colour, £2.95/US$5.00
Postcard of the poem, colour, £0.25/US$0.50 or 10 for £2.30/US$5.00

Moving On: A Photopack on Travellers in Britain by Lynne Gerlach *et al*
Key Stages 2 and 3.
Twenty A4 black and white photocards illustrating the life and culture of Travellers in Britain, plus teachers' notes and suggestions for classroom activities.
1987, 0 946690 55 3, £3.00/US$5.95

Black or White?
Poster, 29.5 cm x 42cm, black and white, £2.50/US$5.00.

Children playing, Asmara, Eritrea

Forging New Identities

A collection of autobiographical writings by young refugees and minority students living in London and Amsterdam

These writings cover a wide range of experiences which are touching, thought provoking and highly informative. The young people write about their memories – both good and bad – of leaving their home countries and of their new lives in the UK and the Netherlands. As well as giving first hand accounts of migration, the young students explore how their identities are changing in their host countries – whether through culture, language or religion, or through new friends or challenges.

Forging New Identities provides material for teachers to raise awareness of the experiences of young refugees and minorities. This will be of interest to other young people from similar backgrounds. However, it should also enable young people who are not from minority groups to have a deeper understanding of some of the difficulties refugees face in leaving their own country, the memories, culture and strengths people bring with them and of their hopes for the future.

This book will be useful for young refugees and minorities, for teachers of English as an Additional Language (EAL) and for those who want to bring a global dimension to the classroom.

‘Many refugee children in Western Europe report isolation and racist bullying when they arrive in their new schools. Given media coverage of refugee issues, is hardly surprising. *Forging New Identities* challenges popular misconceptions about refugees. It gives young refugees the opportunity to tell their stories to their peers, to help develop empathy with those forced to flee. Most of all it will help all students see refugees as human beings, not statistics. Every school should have a copy of this book.’

Jill Rutter, *National Education Advisor*, The Refugee Council

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